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Iran Syria Policy and Operations Group

The **Iran Syria Policy and Operations Group (ISOG)** was an interagency organization formed in early 2006 within the U.S. government, consisting of officials from the **State Department**, **White House**, **Central Intelligence Agency**, **Treasury Department**, and other agencies that worked, to influence regime change in **Iran** and to influence its access to world banking and credit institutions. Co-chaired by **Elizabeth Cheney**, the daughter of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, and **Elliot Abrams**, the former staffer for **Ronald Reagan** who was convicted of two felonies in the **Iran-Contra** scandal, the secretive group met weekly for about a year, also working to a lesser extent on **Syria**, in order to encourage **regime change**.^[1] Other members of the group's steering committee were **James F. Jeffrey**, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, who had headed the Iraq Policy group, and **Michael Doran**, a Middle East specialist from the **White House**.

Day to day operations were handled by **David Denehy**, a senior adviser on Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department, and a former official with the **International Republican Institute**. The group originally was "housed" in the same Pentagon offices that had housed the **Office of Special Plans**, the group that laid the groundwork for the United States invasion of Iraq.^[2] Before the group's dissoluton, Denehy moved his office from the State Department to the office of the Vice-President and continued to manage the group's affairs from there.^[3] The group operated for little more than a year, with a beginning budget of \$7 million dollars that grew to \$80 million. The group drew public scrutiny when leaks from the State Department revealed that, rather than have the program administered by career State Department staffers, or contracted via a bid process, the program was outsourced to **BearingPoint**, a private corporation specializing in discreet management, whose previous experience included such tasks as overseeing the "emergent" economic development in former USSR countries, and the more recent privatization of gold mines in **Khazakstan**. ISOG's first BearingPoint staffers had also been hired to man the controversial **Iraq Policy and Operations Group**.^[4] Critics of the outsourcing maneuver cited it as an effort to circumvent the normal diplomatic channels and federal transparency guidelines and laws.^[5]

The group had 5 "pillars:"

- a military group that explored military aid to Oman, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates and sought to influence the flow of weaponry into Iran.
- "democracy outreach" group that provided secret financial assistance to groups inside Syria and Iran in an attempt to promote regime change.
- an economic "development" group that sought to control Iran's access to credit, and to international banking services

- a "special relationships" group that scrutinized the interactions of Iran with Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan, and independent terrorist organizations.
- a media outreach group that targeted the people of Iran, Syria, and the Persian Gulf region.

The group arranged the sale of military equipment to Iran and Syria's neighbors, and otherwise used discretionary and secret funding of undisclosed amounts to "promote democracy" in the Middle East. The ISOG has given aid to the militaries of [Saudi Arabia](#), the [United Arab Emirates](#), and [Bahrain](#), and also to the political opposition in Iran.^[1] The group was disbanded after little more than a year, when its mission had become controversial and at cross-purposes with Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#)'s initiatives for working with Iran and Syria to stabilize Iraq.^[6] At this time, ABC News reported, President Bush granted "secret" presidential approval to the CIA to conduct "black" operations to destabilized the Iranian government in a "non-lethal presidential finding" that authorized propaganda, disinformation, and manipulation of Iran's currency and international banking transactions.^[7]

On May 29, 2007, Undersecretary of State [R. Nicholas Burns](#) reported to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a letter that "The ISOG was established in March 2006 and disbanded in March 2007 in favor of a more standard process". The dissolution of the group was interpreted at the time in media reports as indication that "hardliners" on Iran in the Bush government had lost their influence, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice steered the country away from militaristic policy planning and towards diplomacy.^[8] As late as April 11, 2009, Iranian officials investigating "cyber-crimes" (Revolution Guards Corps) cited Cheney's efforts in the daily newspaper *Iran*, specifically the "Democracy Program" (sic) initiative as parallel to a Netherlands-funded push for a "velvet revolution" accomplished by a media campaign to polarize the country, "despite the 1981 Algiers Accords signed between the U.S. and Iran in the aftermath of the U.S. embassy takeover in Tehran."^[9]

See also ^[edit]

- [Nuclear program of Iran](#)
- [New Great Game](#)
- [Elizabeth Cheney](#)

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